

Alice the Vampire Slayer

by
JJ Maddox
and
Lewis Carroll

in
Wonderland

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**Lewis Carroll
and
J.J. Maddox**

www.jjmaddox.com

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Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
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Chapter One: Down the Rabbit-Hole

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do but wait for nightfall when the bloodsuckers would come out.

She should have been carving up more stakes; she only had seven left. She would need at least a dozen to make it through the harried hours between dusk and dawn. Once or twice she had considered asking her sister to help out, but Lorina wanted nothing to do with hunting.

Alice's sister had never been a particularly gifted slayer. Despite coming from a long line of vampire hunters, Lorina had opted out of the family business early on. It was just as well. Lorina was slow on her feet and possessed remarkably bad aim. She also recoiled at the sight of blood. All these things combined made her a very bad hunter. Early on Alice had learned to shoulder much of the burden, taking over as primary slayer when she was just 10-years-old.

Now, at 16, Alice was known as one of the strongest vampire hunters in all the land.

Lorina, in turn, spent most of her time indoors, preferring to lose herself in books and fantasy rather than the bleak reality they faced: that their seemingly picturesque world was overrun by the undead.

Alice was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy), whether she had enough garlic left to string together a necklace of cloves to wear on her hunt tonight, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

There was nothing so remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it unusual to hear the Rabbit say to itself, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!" Until he added, "The Blood Queen will have my head!"

The Blood Queen? Alice had never heard of such a person, but her ears perked up instantly.

As far as Alice knew, there was no queen in these parts, and certainly not a “blood queen.” The name implied she was a member of the vampire race. Not just a member, Alice corrected herself, but a *ruler*. It was her sworn duty to check it out.

The Rabbit took a watch out of its waist-coat pocket, looked at it, and then hurried on. It flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it. Alice started to her feet.

Her slayer’s instinct burning strong, she ran across the field after the White Rabbit, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.

Alice would investigate, but first:

“Lorina!” she called out to her sister. “It’s sundown soon. Get back to the house, lock yourself in – ”

Lorina looked up lazily. She didn’t budge an inch, just kept flipping through the book she was reading as if Alice’s words meant nothing.

“I’m serious!” Alice said. “Hurry home, barricade the doors and windows, and don’t open them until you see the sunrise tomorrow.”

“And if I don’t?” Lorina yawned, stretching out her body in the warm sun. For someone who had grown up in a land plagued by bloodsuckers, Lorina had very little fear of vampires. Which might make sense if she were actually capable of defending herself against one, should an attack occur. But it was quite the opposite. Lorina had only killed three vampires in her time, and even then she’d done so with assistance from Alice. But because she stayed so far away from the hunt, Lorina had a skewed opinion of how

dangerous things were. She'd been sheltered from the worst of it, which gave her a false sense of security.

"Don't argue with me," Alice said forcefully. "You've been out of the hunt too long; you don't know what it's like out there." It was true. Their mother was a slayer, but Alice had been the only one to inherit her gift for hunting.

Lorina sighed and climbed up, gathering her book and blanket and starting toward the house. "And what will you be doing while I'm locked away like some prisoner?"

"Something has come up that I must investigate. Tell Mom and Dad I've gone out on a big kill. They'll understand."

Dashing back across the field, Alice ran to her bedroom to retrieve her supply of hunting tools: the seven stakes, her lucky crucifix, her pouch full of garlic and a large vial of holy water. Then she hurried out of the house and back toward the field where she'd seen the Rabbit. On her way she bumped into Lorina, who was finally heeding the warning to get indoors. Alice gave her sister a quick hug goodbye and then, as a precaution, decided to leave her three stakes.

"You shouldn't have any trouble tonight," Alice said, "provided you stay inside like I've instructed. But just in case." She placed the stakes in her sister's hand.

Lorina shrugged, glancing down at the sharply-carved wooden posts. "I'll give them to Mom and Dad," she said.

"Fine then," Alice said. She couldn't wait any longer. She had to find the White Rabbit; he was the only one who could lead her to the Blood Queen.

She quickly ran back to the spot where the Rabbit had disappeared. As she approached the rabbit-hole, she heard something behind her – a cackle followed by a deep, throaty snarl. The sound was unmistakable to her ears. Alice whirled around to find herself face to face with the tallest vampire

she'd ever seen. He stood at least fifteen feet, maybe more. His fangs – nearly twelve inches in length – were fully extended, his eyes wild with hunger as he closed in on her.

In all her days of slaying vampires Alice had never seen anything like him before, and she knew instantly that what the White Rabbit had said was true. There must be a Blood Queen living in these parts, for how else could such a magnificent monster have ever come to be?

Alice readied herself, her right hand clasped nervously around her stake. The vampire took a small step forward and his skin, which was already starting to burn under the hot sun, now began to crackle and peel as the light hit him straight on. He let out another snarl, loud, furious but his flesh had begun to bubble and was rapidly turning an angry shade of red. In a flash of movement so quick it was almost invisible to the human eye, the vampire flung himself down the rabbit-hole.

Acting on pure instinct, Alice leapt into the rabbit-hole after him.

She'd spent the last six years of her life chasing vampires, and one of the first rules of hunting was that when the prey was in your sight, you didn't let them get away.

But the second she dropped into the rabbit-hole, Alice knew she'd made a grave mistake. She had never seen a breed like him before – bigger, faster, and able to withstand the sun better than any vamp she had previously encountered. She should have gone back for reinforcement – her mother was a hunter once, perhaps she could offer some insight in dealing with this type of beast. At the very least, she should have taken the time to gather and carve more stakes. Who knew if the ones she had would big be enough to pierce his heart.

And then there was the business of making it back. Alice had dropped into the rabbit-hole without ever once considering how in the world she was going to get *out* again.

This thought got scarier the farther she dropped.

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down – so suddenly that Alice lost grip of her crucifix as she fell; it tumbled from her hands and crashed against the wall beside her, shattering like glass. Alice didn't have a second to think about it, nor was she capable of stopping herself from falling farther and farther into what was turning out to be one very deep well.

Alice kept her eyes trained on the sides of the well as she fell. All around her were cupboards and bookshelves containing maps and pictures. There were also jars and vials. She caught sight of one rather large jar as she passed; it was labeled 'HUMAN BLOOD: INFANT' much to her great horror.

Down, down, down.

Would the fall NEVER come to an end? It didn't surprise her that the vampire had already reached the bottom; they moved much quicker than humans.

She clung desperately to her stakes, garlic and holy water, determined not to drop them as she had the crucifix

"I wonder how many miles I've fallen?" she asked aloud. "I must be getting somewhere near the center of earth." Which led to a terrifying thought: *Maybe I'm falling into Hell.*

It would only make sense. Where would a vampire queen live if not in Hell?

Alice desperately tried to calculate how far it was to the center of the Earth. *"Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think? Yes, that's about the right distance."* She comforted herself with the thought that she had not yet fallen that far, and, therefore, couldn't possibly be traveling through Hell.

Down, down, down she went, when suddenly, thump!

She landed on a pile of sticks and dry leaves, and the fall was over.

Much to her relief, Alice was not a bit hurt. She leapt to her feet, looking around. Above her was all dark; before her was another long passage. As she suspected, the vampire was long gone. But, quite shockingly, the strange White Rabbit was still in sight, scurrying down the passageway up ahead.

Alice feared she would never find either one of them again. But it seemed luck was on her side – the White Rabbit could lead her right to the Blood Queen.

There was not a moment to be lost. Alice took off running at full speed, rushing to catch up with the Rabbit. She was just in time to hear the Rabbit say, as it turned a corner, “Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!”

And then she lost him. Despite moving as fast as she could, Alice had not managed to keep up with the Rabbit.

Instead, she found herself alone in a long, low hall, which was lit up by a row of lamps hanging from the roof. There were doors all around the hall, but they were all locked. Alice went all the way down one side and up the other, trying every door. Nothing. When she was finished, she walked down the middle of the hall, feeling defeated, wondering how she was ever to get out again.

Suddenly she came upon a little three-legged table, made of solid glass. There was nothing on it except a tiny golden key, and Alice's first thought was that it might belong to one of the doors of the hall.

No such luck. Either the locks were too large, or the key was too small, but at any rate it would not open any of them. However, on the second time around, Alice came upon a low curtain she had not noticed before, and

behind it was a tiny door about fifteen inches high. She tried the little golden key in the lock, and was thrilled to find it was a perfect fit.

Alice opened the door and discovered that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole. She wondered if the Rabbit could have disappeared through here? She knew the vampire couldn't have fit – he was at least a hundred times too large – but it was possible the small rabbit might have squeezed through.

Alice knelt down and looked along the small passage; on the other side was the plushiest, most extravagant garden she had ever seen. Relief washed over her. The bright, radiant sunshine on the other side could provide a temporary safe haven from whatever vampires were roaming about. Alice had yet to encounter any bloodsuckers since arriving at the bottom of the well, but she knew it was only a matter of time until one – or, more likely – a herd descended upon her.

Alice was well practiced at slaying the undead; after six years, she had it down to a science. Yes, vampires were quick, but by the time they'd gotten within a few feet of a human they were so drunk off the scent of blood you could gain the upper hand if you knew what you were doing. And Alice did. She knew how to bob and weave, duck and cover, lunge forward and back with just the right timing to disorient a vampire for a few seconds – long enough for her skilled hands to plunge a stake right through their heart.

From the time she was a very small girl, Alice had been groomed to be a slayer. While other children learned to jump rope and recite their ABCs, Alice was schooled in the ways of stake throwing, bloodletting, and decapitation. She'd been taught by her mother, and taught well.

There were only three ways to kill a vampire: the best known, and most effective, was a stake straight through the heart. But since you rarely got more than one chance to stake a vamp – if you went for the heart and missed, you'd likely be dead before you even realized what was happening – it required flawless aim. Fortunately, Alice had this, so staking was her

primary method of slaying. But there were two other methods that could be employed, and she relied on these on occasion.

Decapitation was quick and effective, but you needed an axe or a large sword, neither of which could be easily concealed. Since the element of surprise played an important role in hunting – it was crucial a vampire didn't recognize you were a slayer until he'd gotten close enough to become disoriented by the scent of your blood – that decapitation wasn't very practical.

The third and final method, the riskiest and hardest to perform, was bloodletting. It had only recently been discovered that vampires had an Achilles heel, a lone weak spot in the form of a vein that, if sliced in half, would cause them to bleed so profusely that they would hemorrhage and die in under a minute.

It was said to be the most gruesome way to kill the undead – excruciatingly painful, and gory beyond belief. Snip the vein at just the right angle, and the vamp's blood would gush so fast and furious you'd wind up drenched from head to toe if you weren't careful.

Alice had never killed a vampire in this manner, only heard the stories.

She wondered silently which method she should employ to take on the bloodsuckers who lived in this strange world. If they were anything like the vampire she'd followed down the rabbit-hole, staking them would be difficult. She wasn't tall enough to reach their hearts, and she had no practice at throwing stakes at such an upward tilted angle.

The vampires who lived here appeared to be a different breed entirely than what she was used to. They were much bigger, for one thing, and their flesh held up better in the sunlight, for another. Most vampires would catch fire within mere seconds of exposure – but the one she'd spied earlier had been able to withstand the sun for a few minutes without igniting. If her *minions* were this advanced, Alice shuddered at the thought of how large and powerful the Queen must be.

The ideal plan would be to find the Blood Queen while the sun was still high in the sky, and take her out while she slept in her lair.

But Alice knew this was unrealistic. For starters, it was possible the Queen was mighty enough to not need to retreat during daylight hours. For another, even if she did, getting in and slaying her in her coffin would probably be impossible.

Most vampires went to great lengths to protect their lairs, hiding them in secret locations and protecting them with booby-traps so sophisticated they would have put the Egyptian Pharaohs to shame. Those vamps who could afford it even employed armed humans to work as guards during the daylight hours. Alice knew someone so powerful as the Blood Queen – assuming her name proved to be true – would likely have some sort of army guarding her lair.

Still, Alice longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander among the beds of bright flowers and cool fountains at the other end of the passageway. But it was no use; she could not even get her head through the doorway.

And even if my head would go through, thought Alice, *it would be of very little use without my shoulders and arms.* For she needed her arms to carry her hunting equipment.

Oh, how I wish I could shut up like a telescope! She thought.

She had seen a vampire perform a similar feat once, contorting his body inward like an accordion until he was only a fraction of his normal size. She'd had no idea how he did it, only that it seemed like quite the useful trick. And it had saved him – for a bit, at least. For when he was folded up like that Alice couldn't reach any part of him – head, heart, or bloodletting vein – that would allow her to kill him

Maybe I could compact and shrink, if I only know how to begin.

So many out-of-the-way things had happened lately – the talking rabbit, the giant vampire – that Alice had begun to think that very few things were really impossible.

There seemed to be no use in waiting by the little door, so she went back to the three-legged table, half hoping she might find another key on it.

The time she found a little bottle. “This wasn’t here before,” she mumbled aloud. Around the neck of the bottle was a paper label, with the words ‘DRINK ME’ beautifully printed on it in large letters.

It was all very well to say ‘Drink me,’ but Alice was no fool. She was not going to do *that* in a hurry.

The liquid could be anything. What she feared most of all was that it was vampire blood, left there as a trick. ‘*Drink me,*’ and *lose your humanity*, she thought.

Drinking vampire blood on its own was not enough to “turn” a human – you had to be bitten first, *then* drink the blood – but that didn’t mean it was harmless. Far from it.

For the land where Alice lived was not just populated with vampires and humans – there was also a third group of people, a strange race known as the Halflings.

Halflings were no longer human, not but full vampire, either. And as far as Alice could tell, they had gotten the short end of the stick in both worlds. They didn’t possess any of the “good” vampire qualities: super human strength, lightening quick speed, immunity against disease. But they were cursed with all of the bad traits: the unquenchable thirst for blood, and an allergy to sunlight so strong it would burn them to a crisp if they ventured outdoors during daylight hours. The only good quality the Halflings shared with their vampire brethren was immortality. And even that wasn’t such a good thing when you considered how miserable their quality of life tended to be.

No one knew for sure how Halflings were made. For a long time it was thought they were the product of humans and vampires breeding, but that had been disproved. It was now widely believed that Halflings were created when a human being ingested vampire blood, without having the “benefit” of being bitten first.

“No, I will not drink this,” Alice said. “Unless I can determine it’s not vampire blood, or some other type of poison.”

Alice was almost as frightened of poison as she was of vampire blood. *Almost*. Sometimes it was hard to remember that there were other risky things in the world aside from the undead. Alice spent so much of her time hunting vampires down and killing them that she tended to forget about the other dangers that lurked.

She had read several nice little histories about children who had gotten burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their parents had taught them: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that if you cut your finger very deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds. And, of course, if you drink much from a bottle of “poison,” it is almost certain to disagree with you, and disagree with you badly.

However, after unscrewing the cap Alice quickly discovered that this bottle did not appear to be vampire blood. She’d spent enough time around the stuff that she’d recognize its scent anywhere – a sickly sweet smell that was a cross between ammonia and overripe fruit.

As for poison...Alice couldn’t be so sure. She had come this far, and she was not one to turn back from a mission.

Besides, there was one other thing Alice remembered from reading about poisons; there were very few that could kill you outright if you made sure to only try the tiniest of quantities.

Still, Alice wasn't crazy. Sampling it would be a last resort only if she could find no other option. She went round the room again, checking the key against all the locks – still no luck. So she sat down to wait, hoping either the Rabbit or the vampire would return.

Hours ticked by and nothing happened. With each passing moment, Alice grew more worried. The sun was still high in the sky, but it would be setting soon. She had to find a way out of here and into the garden.

So Alice did the one thing she thought she'd never be forced to do: she ventured to taste the strange liquid. She set down her pile of hunting tools in the corner, and picked up the bottle. She then gingerly dipped her index finger into the top and retrieved a small droplet onto the tip.

She brought it up to her tongue and tasted the liquid. The flavor was very nice – like that of cherry-tart, custard, pineapple, roast turkey, toffee, and hot buttered toast all in one. This alarmed Alice. Not just that such a strange combination could work so well together, but that she found herself instantly craving more of the strange drink.

If one were to create a poison, wouldn't one's primary concern – aside from ensuring that the poison was dosed correctly – be to make the poison taste so good that the intended victim kept right on drinking it?

Alice set the bottle down immediately, ignoring the overpowering urge to finish it off.

She tried to reassure herself with the knowledge that very few poisons could be lethal in tiny doses, and that she'd had the tiniest dose possible – only one small droplet placed on her tongue.

But the reassurance didn't last long as her mind soon grew hazy and the room around her began to blur.

* * *

“It’s happening!” said Alice. “I’m shutting up like a telescope!”

It was true, she thought. The saying she’d always heard, but never given enough thought to before now: *Be careful what you wish for*.

But there was nothing she could do to stop it now. It must have been the effects of the drink, for before she realized what was happening she was only ten inches high.

Alice waited for an agonizing few minutes to see if she was going to shrink any further.

“What if it ends,” said Alice to herself, “with me going out altogether, like a candle flame? Maybe that was the intention of the bottle: to snuff me out for good.”

After a while, her fears were eased when nothing more happened.

She was now the perfect size to fit through the passageway, so she decided to go to the garden immediately.

But when she got to the door, she found she had forgotten the little golden key. When she went back to the table for it, she discovered she was too short to reach it: she could see it quite plainly through the glass, and she tried her best to climb up one of the legs of the table, but it was too slippery.

She looked around the room for something else to help her out. Soon her eye fell on a little glass box that was lying under the table: she opened it, and found in it a very small cake, on which the words 'EAT ME' were beautifully marked in currants.

“No way,” Alice said aloud, shaking her head. She would not make that mistake twice. She would find another way to get the key. Alice looked around for her hunting tools and experienced a momentary wave of terror when she couldn’t find them. Fortunately, they were still over in the corner where she had set them before tasting the strange liquid. Alice hurried over

to get them, only to discover that, due to her sudden small stature, she could not longer pick them up. At ten inches tall, her stakes were almost as big as she was.

How could she face the Blood Queen at this size, without the benefit of having any of her tools? She'd be useless, like a lamb being led into the slaughter. Unless...

A thought occurred to Alice. She had never tried bloodletting a vampire, but given her small size she might be able to sneak in close enough to reach the vein....

Though it was useless to try to get the stakes – they were far too large for her to carry – Alice decided to try to bring along the holy water and garlic for protection. She struggled mightily to pick the vial of holy water up in her tiny hands, but just as she'd managed to get hold of it, her grasp slipped and it tumbled to the ground, shattering into a thousand tiny pieces.

She watched helplessly as the powerful liquid dissipated into a puddle on the floor. And then something very unexpected happened, something that hadn't happened in a great many years.

Alice began to cry.

Chapter Two: The Pool of Tears

It was uncharacteristic of her to break down like this. She was usually brave and logical, but it had all been too much. She cursed herself for making so many poor decisions. Starting with following the vampire down the rabbit-hole, then drinking the poison, and ending with dropping the vial of holy water.

They had all led her here, and here was a very bad place to be.

Alice couldn't believe she had been so foolish, acted in such a rash manner as to jump into the rabbit-hole without at least checking things out a bit more first.

She had let her confidence get the better of her. For six long years Alice had been patrolling the forests and gardens of her homeland, painstakingly trying to do away with the vampire race one bloodsucker at a time. It was a tedious undertaking. She rarely slept, for she hunted all night long. Few others shared her profession – her mother and grandmother had been slayers, and her sister had worked as one briefly – but for the most part Alice lived a lonely life. She spent every spare second chasing vampires, and it left little time for friends or hobbies.

And in the beginning, she hadn't minded it so much, had taken pride in her work – great pride, in fact. But as the years went on, and the vampires continued to multiply and spread, Alice couldn't help but feel more than a little disillusioned with the life she'd chosen (or, more accurately, the life that had chosen *her*).

If only she could gain some traction, make some real leeway, finally see a decline, instead of a constant *increase*, in the vampire race, then she might feel better. But they were growing as fast as she could kill them – faster, even.

There had been a rumor circulating among the land for some time now, the rumor that a queen bee of sorts – a Blood Queen – was at the heart of the rapid breeding. Cut off the head of the snake, and you kill the beast. Take her out the queen, and you can take out the herd.

And that had been Alice's thinking when she had jumped down the rabbit-hole. She'd been on the lookout for this vampire ruler for the past year and she had jumped – quite literally – at the first chance she'd had to find her.

But what if it had all been a trap? What if the White Rabbit had been sent to lure her to her death?

She had no more time to ponder this, though; just then her head struck against the roof of the hall.

Alice was stunned to discover that instead of being ten inches tall, she was now nine feet high.

“What is going on here?” she said aloud. “What the *hell* is going on?” How had she suddenly started growing? How had she not noticed? What was going on with her body, with her mind?

At least now I can manage my weapons! she thought excitedly. Then she remembered, smacking herself on the forehead, cursing herself for forgetting why she had wanted to be small in the first place: the only door leading out was impossibly small. Even at her normal size, she was trapped. At nine feet tall, she would likely be a prisoner here forever.

Alice began to cry again, shedding gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching halfway down the hall. She watched, feeling helpless and defeated, as her tears soaked the floor, covering the holy water she'd spilled earlier.

How can a person cry so much? Alice wondered. It only made sense, though; she'd not cried in a great long time. Perhaps this was several years worth of tears all coming out at once.

After a time she heard a little pattering of feet in the distance, and she hastily dried her eyes to see what was coming. It was the White Rabbit returning!

He was splendidly dressed, with a pair of white kid gloves in one hand and a large fan in the other. He came trotting along in a great hurry, muttering to himself as he came, "Oh! the Queen, the Queen! Won't she be savage if I've kept her waiting!"

He moved so quickly, almost as quick as a vampire, but Alice knew that wasn't possible. Animals couldn't be turned. Then again, last she checked animals couldn't talk, either....

Alice felt nervous around him, for reasons she couldn't explain. Watching him move so fast was a bit frightening. It truly was like watching a bloodsucker on the prowl. For a moment Alice worried he might actually be one, animal or not, but then she remembered: he'd been in the sunlight earlier that day and his skin hadn't so much as blistered. She breathed a sigh of relief and tried to get the Rabbit's attention.

When he finally came near her, Alice said, in a low, casual voice, "Hello, sir. I wondered if you might help me?"

The Rabbit started violently, dropped his small white gloves and fan and scurried away into the darkness as fast as he could go.

Alice grabbed his gloves, and, as the hall was very hot, she kept fanning herself all the time as she chased after him.

As she dashed down the hall after him, Alice remembered an old poem she'd learned, taught to her by her mother when she was just a little girl.

How doth the wicked vampyre

*Charm human souls so well?
To glamour them with just one look
And trap them in his spell.*

*How cheerfully he seems to grin,
His fangs masked from display.
But be not fooled, he dreams of skin –
Your flesh is but his prey.*

Alice recited it under her breath, and her voice sounded hoarse and strange. It was a cautionary tale, to remind her to never trust a bloodsucker – or even a charming human for that matter.

As she said the poem she looked down at her hands, and was surprised to see that she had put on one of the Rabbit's little white kid gloves while she was talking.

How can I have done that? she thought. *I must be growing small again!*

Without even realizing it, Alice had returned to normal size. She shook her head, trying to dislodge the haziness. Part of her was worried this was all an illusion, that she was going mad. How was it possible that she could grow small, then big, then normal? In all her years of hunting vampires, she thought she'd seen some of the strangest things the world had to offer, but nothing could have prepared her for this. Still, she was grateful to have returned to her ordinary size, even if it meant she was still trapped.

Suddenly, her foot slipped, and in another moment, *splash!* She was up to her chin in salt water.

Her first idea was that she had somehow fallen into the sea. However, she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high.

“Why did I have to cry so much!” said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out. “All this worry over bloodsuckers, and in the end I’m going to be drowned by my own tears!”

Just then she heard something splashing in the pool a little way off, and she swam closer to make out what it was:

It was the White Rabbit, floating on a raft, and looking around anxiously as it went, as if it had lost something.

She heard it muttering to itself, “The water! The water! Oh my dear paws! Oh my fur and whiskers! She’ll get me executed, if the water doesn’t drown me first!”

Very soon the Rabbit noticed Alice, as she went swimming by, and called out to her, “Why did you trap me out here?”

“I didn’t trap you,” Alice said.

“But you cried these tears, did you not?” he asked.

“Yes, but – ”

“Then you trapped me! I am late, so very late, and you have trapped me here in the middle of nowhere. I am lucky I found this raft, or I would’ve drowned. You know rabbits cannot swim.”

“I know, and I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize this would happen. It was an accident.”

“Well, accident or not, here we are.”

“Here we are,” Alice said.

“What is it you want from me?”

“I’m afraid I’m stuck,” she said. “I followed you down the rabbit-hole,” she said, careful to leave out any mention of the vampire, “and now I don’t know how to get out of here.”

“Oh, cry me a river! Wait, you’ve done that already!” He rolled his little pink eyes in disgust. “So you invaded my privacy, you stranded me out here, but now you want me to help you?”

He had a point. And now that he said it, Alice felt truly awful. She didn’t want him to drown out here. “I’m sorry,” Alice said. “I really am. I’m a strong swimmer. Why don’t you let me pull your raft back to shore?”

He considered this. “I suppose that would be helpful.”

Alice began to swim toward him.

“What is it you want from me?” the Rabbit asked as she paddled closer.

“I want to know about the Blood Queen. I heard you talking about her earlier, before you jumped in the rabbit-hole.”

His eyes grew huge.

“You do not want to know,” he said.

“Yes, I do.” Alice reached his raft and hooked her arm through a plank of wood on the end. “I have to find her.”

“That is very dangerous!” the White Rabbit said. “No one looks for the Queen! People hide from her. She is very dangerous.”

“You were looking for her earlier.”

“That’s because we have an appointment tonight. If I do not show up she will have my head.” He made a slicing motion as if to portray himself being decapitated.

“An appointment about what?” Alice asked.

“I do not know.” The Rabbit chewed on his bunny lip nervously. “All I know is that I must be there or it’s off with my head!”

“Perhaps I could go with you? I could protect you?”

The Rabbit seemed to consider this. “No, she will smell you from a mile away and then she will have us both killed. I must go alone.”

They were getting closer to the shore.

“Can you at least tell me how to find her?”

The Rabbit shook his head. “I have said too much already. It is blasphemy to speak of the Queen when she is not present. I have said enough to get me killed already.”

“So you can’t help me out at all?” Alice asked.

The Rabbit shuffled nervously back and forth, hopping in place. “She lives in a palace, I can tell you that.”

Alice was about to object that this wasn’t much information – that she had already guessed as much – when the Rabbit added, “And the palace is where all trials and executions are held, and they are held almost every night after sundown.” He lowered his voice. “But I shall tell you a secret. The verdict is always decided *before* the trial, and the verdict is always the same – ‘Off with his head!’”

Alice wondered how this cheery piece of information was supposed to be helpful. So the Queen didn't believe in giving her citizens a fair trial? Big shock. Then the Rabbit continued, "You know how vampires get when they are in the presence of human blood?"

Alice nodded.

"The Queen is immune to that. She does not get punch drunk. She maintains her composure. There is only one time when she is drunk enough with bloodlust to be rendered weak – it is when she has ordered a beheading."

Alice took in all this information and stored it gratefully. So that was it; her one chance to strike would be during the trial tonight.

"Thank you," she told the Rabbit. As they reached the shore, they agreed to part ways and never discuss this conversation again.

"Don't you want to know what I am planning to do tonight?" Alice asked.

"No," The White Rabbit said, shaking his head vehemently. "The less I know, the better." And with that, he scampered off out of view.

Chapter Three: Advice from a Caterpillar

Once Alice reached the shore, she hurriedly made her way up the beach and past the row of rocks that stood tall in the distance. The Rabbit hadn't given her directions to the palace, but she knew it was somewhere back where she'd come from, and judging by the position of the sun in the sky, she needed to head West.

But much to Alice's shock, she discovered that once she'd crossed the other side of the rocks the landscape was entirely different. Where there had been beach, there was now a lush forest full of trees and flowers and many beautiful mushrooms.

One large mushroom in particular caught her eye. Alice couldn't figure out why, but there was something about it that was special. She stretched herself up on tiptoe, and peeped over the edge of the mushroom, and her eyes immediately met those of a large caterpillar, that was sitting on the top with its arms folded, quietly smoking a long hookah, and taking not the smallest notice of her or of anything else.

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence; at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

"Who are *you*?" said the Caterpillar, staring at her accusingly.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

“Explain yourself!” the Caterpillar demanded.

“I don’t have to explain myself to you,” said Alice, turning to walk away.

“Come back!” the Caterpillar called after her. “I’ve got something important to say!”

Alice decided to hear him out. She turned on her heel and walked back to him.

The Caterpillar stared her up and down for a very long time, and then said, “Keep your temper.”

“Is that all you wanted to say?” asked Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could. She did not have time to waste on this nonsense. It would be nightfall soon, which only left her a few hours to find the Blood Queen’s palace. Since she had lost all of her hunting tools, that meant she would have to find wood that was suitable for carving into stakes.

“No, that is not all,” said the Caterpillar.

For some minutes it puffed away on the hookah without speaking, but at last it unfolded its arms, took the pipe out of its mouth again, and said, “I know who you are.”

“You do?” she asked skeptically.

“You are the slayer.”

This took her by surprise. She didn’t know whether she should tell him the truth. Could she trust him? She decided the answer was “no.”

“Alice,” he said, pausing to take a big puff from his hookah. “I believe that’s your name.”

Now she was downright startled. She had not told him her name. How could he know this? She still wasn't sure if trusting him was the right decision, but trusting the White Rabbit had ultimately proved helpful; she decided to take her chances.

"My name is Alice," she admitted.

"I thought so," said the Caterpillar. "Tell me this, Alice. Why on earth did you come here?"

"I – "

"It is wrong from beginning to end," said the Caterpillar bluntly, and there was silence for some minutes.

The Caterpillar was the first to speak.

"You will surely get yourself killed," he said. "I know that, too."

"Well don't you just know everything," Alice said, agitated.

"Not everything. But of this I am certain – as I certain as the sky is blue and the grass is green. Except when the sky is green and the grass is blue."

Alice was starting to find him to be really annoying.

"How can you possibly know what will happen to me?" she asked, losing her patience again.

The caterpillar continued smoking. "You fell into the rabbit-hole, did you not?"

"I jumped," she admitted.

“Even worse. So you chose this. Well, now, I have lost all sympathy for you.” He returned to his pipe.

Alice said nothing. She wasn’t sure whether to swat him away like the simple insect he was or hear him out.

“You chose this,” the Caterpillar continued.

Alice felt rage building inside her. “Maybe so, but what other choice did I have? I’m a hunter, you know that, and I was merely following my prey. I was trying to find the queen.”

“You made a choice,” insisted the Caterpillar. “You could have stayed where you were.”

“And let the evil queen go free?” Alice replied.

“How do you know she is evil?” asked the Caterpillar.

This stopped Alice in her tracks. How *did* she know that? She was merely going by assumptions, basing it off the name she’d heard the White Rabbit call her by.

“She’s not evil, then?”

“Oh, no,” said the Caterpillar. “She is very evil.”

“Then why are you scolding me so much?” asked Alice. And she thought to herself, *Why are the creatures here all so temperamental and difficult?*

“Because you are no match for her,” he said. “When you try to kill her, you will fail. And you will make her very angry in the process, and she will take that anger out on all of us.”

“But what if I succeed?” Alice asked.

He puffed on his hookah and exhaled. “You won’t,” the Caterpillar said. “I am certain of it, Alice.”

“How do you know my name, anyway?” Alice asked.

“Everyone in Wonderland knows your name,” the Caterpillar said. “You are a legend, the one great slayer, the only one the Queen has ever feared.”

Alice blushed at the unexpected compliment. Then the Caterpillar said:

“How wrong she was, though. As we can all now see you are not the great slayer they made you out to be. You could not even find your way out of a simple maze. You had not the sense to avoid the shrinking potion. You jumped down the rabbit-hole and then made one mistake after another. That’s how I know you will die. I know you will die, because the legend of you being a great slayer was wrong.”

Alice bristled. She was unsure of how to respond to this. She wanted to strike back – both literally and figuratively – but part of her feared he was right.

“You are not even as good a slayer as the one who came before you,” the Caterpillar continued. “*He* lasted three days in Wonderland before he made the mistake of drinking the potion, whereas you barely lasted three hours.”

Alice’s mind was reeling. There had been another slayer who had come here – to this strange place deemed Wonderland – before her? And a *male* slayer, at that? She had never in her life heard of such a thing. As far as Alice knew, only women could be slayers. Surely, the Caterpillar was mistaken.

“There are no male slayers,” Alice said. “Only women.”

“So you believe,” said the Caterpillar, “but you are wrong. There is a male slayer. His name is Tobias – was. He may be dead now for all I know.”

“What happened?” Alice asked.

“Same as you.” Puff, puff. “Came here to kill the Blood Queen, but failed. Only he lasted a little longer than you did. As I see, you’ve already lost all of your weaponry. He came to battle fully armed, and still failed.”

Alice swallowed hard. This was getting worse by the minute. Her only hope was the Caterpillar was wrong. How could he know all of this, anyway? Just because he knew her name, didn’t mean he was the expert on slaying vampires.

“How do you know so much?” she asked.

“I know everything, my dear Alice,” said the Caterpillar. “For I speak to everyone. The trees, the birds, every insect and animal in all the land. I am the best man to ask if it is knowledge you seek.”

He was hardly a *man*, but she let it slide. She was grateful for the information he had provided, even if all it did was confuse and horrify her.

If only there was a way to get my weapons back, Alice thought, At least that would give me a fighting chance.

“You cannot get your weapons back,” said the Caterpillar, as if she had spoken aloud – which disturbed her, for Alice knew she had only thought it. “For they were washed away in the same flood of tears that took you out to sea. But I *do* know a way for you to get new weapons if you would like.”

“What is it?” Alice asked.

“You may not like it,” said the Caterpillar, and it put the hookah into its mouth and began smoking again.

This time Alice waited patiently until it chose to speak again. In a minute or two the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and yawned once or twice, and shook itself. Then it got down off the mushroom, and crawled away in the grass, merely remarking as it went, “One side will make you grow weaker, and the other side will make you grow stronger.”

“One side of *what*? The other side of *what*?” Alice asked.

“Of the mushroom,” said the Caterpillar. “The one I’ve been sitting on. One side will give you special powers – the speed and strength of a vampire. And the other side will have the opposite effect: to make you very slow and weak. I should advise you to eat one half and take the other with you. If you can get close enough, you can grind it up and slip it into the Queen’s nightly meal of boiled blood. This will help weaken her and slow her down, so that you may stand a fighting chance when you attack. ”

Alice looked curiously at the mushroom for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it; it was perfectly round, and both sides were identical. However, at last she stretched her arms around it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of each edge with her hands.

“Okay, now which is which?” she said to the Caterpillar.

He paused for a very long time, as if trying to figure it out himself. Then he said, “The side you are holding in your left hand. That is the side you wish to eat. The side in your right hand is the one you wish to give to the Queen.”

“Are you sure?” Alice asked. He didn’t look so sure. And after her experience of drinking the potion earlier she was very hesitant to eat anything unless she was absolutely positive what the effects would be.

“After all I have told you, you will not trust me!” said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high).

Alice decided to trust him. He seemed decent enough, but mostly, what other choice did she have?

With great trepidation, she nibbled a little of the left-hand bit to try the effect: the next moment she felt a violent blow underneath her chin. The blow was so powerful it knocked her to the ground. She struggled mightily to stand back up, but her body felt as though it weighed a thousand pounds.

You have given me the wrong side! She tried to scream, but the words would not come out. She could barely move her mouth against the agonizing pain.

“Help!” she managed to gasp, and the Caterpillar looked at her in a state of terror. When she glanced back up, he was out of sight.

There was no time to waste; she was losing strength rapidly. She set to work at once to eat some of the other bit. Her chin was pressed so tightly shut, it was almost impossible to open her mouth. But she did it at last, and managed to swallow a morsel of the right-hand bit.

“I’m going to be okay!” said Alice in a tone of delight, which changed into alarm in another moment, when she found that she was frozen stiff. She tried desperately to move her body, but no result seemed to follow, except a little shaking in her limbs.

As there seemed to be no chance of getting herself up, she collapsed deeper into the soft grass, feeling herself grow weary.

She had just succeeded in snuggling down into the warm, lush field when a loud, distinctive snarl made her draw up in a hurry. There, in the distance, stood an enormous blonde-haired vampire, fangs protruding, charging rapidly in her direction.

“I found her!” screamed the bloodsucker.

“Grab her!” another voice called out.

Much to her horror, Alice could see that there were not one, but two, oversized vampires coming her way.

“Slayer!” screamed the first vampire. “One move and I’ll slice your head off.”

As if she could move if she wanted to.

“Slayer,” repeated the blonde vampire, who was now upon her. “At last, we meet. *Oh*, how I’m going to enjoying sucking the blood out of you, until you’re dead dry.”

Alice was glad her body was frozen, because she was afraid she might start crying again.

“Yes, you will be delicious,” the vampire said, licking his lips in anticipation. Alice could see the familiar bloodlust setting in. He was drunk from the scent of her, high off anticipation. This was when they were the most vulnerable. She was pleased to see that the vampires in this strange land – despite being far larger than the ones back home – could still be rendered weak when in the presence of human blood. At least that was one thing that was still predictable.

The vampire crouched down beside Alice and leaned forward until his lips were grazing her body. This was the closest Alice had ever been to a vampire without being able to retaliate; it was infuriating! She felt her stomach rolling over, waves of nausea rising deep inside her body as she lay powerless beneath him. The vampire rubbed his nose against her skin, inhaling deeply. “You smell,” he breathed deeply, “like *Heaven*.”

Fitting, Alice thought, *for I’m pretty sure my initial calculations were wrong. I think I landed in Hell after all.*

He opened his mouth wide, his fangs, fully extended, razor sharp and ready to strike.

“Stop it you imbecile!” his friend screamed, grabbing him by the arm and throwing him into the air. He went flying backward and hit the ground with a loud thud.

“We can’t drink her, Maxmillian!” he said. “She belongs to the Royal Court. You’ll get us both beheaded.”

“And I was planning to deliver her, exactly as instructed.” The blonde, who appeared to be named Maxmillian, said, standing up and dusting himself off. His fangs were still drawn. He began darting his tongue out between them, like a serpent flicking his tongue. “But there is nothing wrong with having a quick bite first. Slayer blood is the tastiest of all.”

“If we so much as leave one mark on her, we’ll be beheaded!” He leaned over and slapped the other vampire square across the face, leaving a red welt. Seeing he was defeated, Maxmillian took a few steps back from Alice, allowing his fangs to recede and his sanity to return.

“Well, let’s go then,” he said, leaning down and scooping Alice up into his arms.

“No,” said the other, who was named Dreck. “I’ll carry her.” He grabbed Alice and then, in a quick and rough motion, tossed her over his shoulder as though she were a sack of potatoes. Alice felt pain ripple through her body as his arm slammed tightly over her.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s get her to the palace.”

Alice squeezed her eyes shut as if willing the scene to go away. She was helpless to do anything but lie limp as a dishrag as they carried her off to certain death.

When she opened her eyes again a few minutes later, she realized they were moving deeper into the forest. She watched as the trees grew thicker; every few feet the vampires would become entangled in one of the branches and have to briefly stop to untwist themselves.

After a while Alice began to regain some feeling in her hands. This was of little good, though, for she still had no use of the rest of her body. Then she remembered! She still had a piece of the magic strengthening mushroom in her hands, and she set to work very carefully, so as not to be noticed by either of the bloodsuckers, bringing her hand up to her mouth. It didn't work the first few times she tried it. She was still too weak to move her hand up far enough. But after a few fruitless attempts, she switched tactics, lowering her head down so that her mouth met her fingers halfway. With great effort, she was able to bring a piece of the mushroom to her lips.

She nibbled at it, slowly at first, her teeth aching from the effort. But as the power began to kick in her bites grew larger and larger until she had succeeded in eating the entire mushroom.

All at once, she felt her strength return. Then, as if by magic, her body began to shift and grow.

The vampire who was carrying her noticed it immediately.

“Hey!” he exclaimed.

But it was too late. Alice was growing – rapidly. Before she even had time to fully comprehend what was happening, her body grew bigger and bigger, until she was nearly fifteen feet tall herself; the same size as the bloodsuckers.

“What the – ” Dreck was so startled that he dropped her from his arms, and she went crashing to the ground.

“How could she –”

“That’s impossible!”

“But she just did!”

Alice didn't wait around for them to finish their conversation. She took off running and was pleased to discover that not only had her size increased, but her speed had as well. She was now capable of running ten times faster than she'd ever run before.

She dashed off into the woods without looking back.

Chapter Four: The Cheshire Cat

Alice didn't stop running until she was sure she'd lost the vampires. Even then, she continued on for another few miles only stopping when she happened upon a small house at the far edge of the woods.

For a brief moment, she stood outside, wondering what to do next. Noting that the home was a rather small cottage, too small to house vampires, she decided it was safe to proceed. She reached her hand up and knocked a few times.

When no one answered, Alice knocked again, then again. Finally, not wanting to stand outside exposed in the woods any longer, she opened the door and went inside.

She was surprised to find the home was empty, save for a large cat which was sitting on the hearth and grinning from ear to ear.

"Hello," said the Cat. "How do you do?"

Alice was immediately suspicious. One thing she had learned in her brief time in this strange land was not to trust anybody – or anything. A cat that grinned so widely was slightly unnerving.

Unsure of what to say, Alice asked, "Why do you smile like that?"

"Because I'm a Cheshire cat," said the cat. "That's why."

"Oh," Alice said. She was at a loss for words. Not that it mattered. The cat seemed to have enough for both of them.

"Welcome," he said, "and thanks for stopping by. Now, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like you to leave."

Her eyes widened. “But you just welcomed me here. Now you want me to leave?”

“Indeed I did,” said the Cat, “and indeed I do.”

This was beyond frustrating. “All right then,” said Alice. “I’ll leave. But first, would you mind if I asked you a few questions?”

“Depends on the questions. I can’t know if I mind unless I know what they are.”

She took that as an invitation to proceed, and said, “Do you know how I can find the Blood Queen’s palace?”

“I do,” said the Cat. His grin grew even wider. “But I will not tell you.”

“And why is that?”

“Because you did not leave my house as I asked you to do.”

“There are vampires outside,” Alice said. “I was hoping I could stay in here and hide out from them.”

“And yet you seek to find the Blood Queen, a vampire more powerful than any roaming these woods.”

Alice sighed. This cat was so frustrating, nothing like her cat Dinah back home. Of course, Dinah didn’t have a scary menacing grin. And Dinah didn’t talk, either.

“If I go outside will you tell me?”

“I might, and I might not. I’m afraid you won’t find out unless you go outside as I’ve asked.”

Alice did as she was told. She wasn't sure what it would accomplish, but she knew that staying there, talking in circles with the Cheshire Cat, was getting her absolutely nowhere. Enough time had passed that the two vampires were likely gone by now. She'd also seen a few branches lying on the ground outside, several of which looked like they'd make excellent stakes. If she was going to find the Blood Queen, she couldn't very well go in unarmed. Whether the Cheshire Cat gave her directions or not, it was time to start working on new weapons.

On her way out of the Cheshire Cat's home, she snuck a small kitchen knife into the pocket of her dress; it would be of great help in carving her stakes. Once outside, Alice set to work gathering branches and whittling the tips down until they began to sharpen into suitable vampire-hunting tools. She'd been working for quite some time, when she heard a soft *meeee-oooow* a few feet from her head.

Alice was quite startled to spy the Cheshire Cat sitting on a bough of a tree a few yards off. She was sure she'd seen the last of him.

The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. *It looked good-natured*, she thought. Still it had very long claws and far too many teeth – not to mention it owned the house it had just kicked her out of. So she felt that it ought to be treated with respect.

“Cheshire Puss,” she began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name. However, it only grinned a little wider. “Now that I have done as you asked, will you please tell me how to find the Blood Queen?”

“That depends a good deal on why you want to find her,” said the Cat.

“Isn't it obvious,” said Alice, gesturing toward the pile of stakes on the ground.

“Yes, I suppose so,” said the Cat. “But you are misguided if you think your silly little tools will be of any use against our Queen.”

Our Queen? Did that mean he was a vampire? She eyed him curiously. “Are you...?” she began.

“I should think not,” said the Cat, genuinely offended. “I am a Cheshire Cat, and we Cheshire Cats would sooner turn into dogs than turn into vampires.”

“So why did you call her our Queen?”

“Because she rules this land,” he said, “and all who live here must bow to her whims or it’s off with our heads!”

“Don’t you want her dead, then?”

“I can’t answer that,” he said. “It would be treason. I can only say that you are not the one who can kill her. Many have tried before you and failed miserably.”

“There have been other slayers?” Alice asked.

“Yes, more than I can remember.”

“I spoke with the Caterpillar and he only told me of one other slayer,” Alice said. “A male named Tobias.”

“That is because the Caterpillar is young. He only remembers what has happened in his lifetime,” said the Cat. “I have lived much longer than him. I have nine lives, you see. The Caterpillar only has one.”

Alice laughed despite herself, and the Cat grinned even more broadly.

“Tobias was the most recent slayer to come here,” the Cheshire Cat continued. “But many other tried and failed before him. And now here you

are. And you will try, and fail, just like all the rest. Then it will be off with your head.”

“But what if I don’t fail?” Alice ventured.

“You will,” said the Cat. “Which is why I will not tell you how to get to the palace. If you wish to find the Queen you must find her without my help.”

Alice felt exasperated. This strange creature was of no use at all. “So you won’t help me at all?” she asked.

“I have already helped you,” he said, raising a paw toward her knife. “Or, shall I say, you have helped yourself to my cutlery.”

Alice blushed. That was true.

“But I will help you with one more thing. I will tell you of a place you can go. If you are truly bent on undertaking this silly quest of yours to go up against our Queen, then you will need to learn all about her before you go.”

“You will tell me then?” she asked eagerly.

“No, but I will tell you where to go to find out information.”

He paused for a very long time, long enough for Alice to finish carving two more stakes. She now had five total, which she felt was enough to carry for they were very large.

Finally, the Cat said, “In THAT direction,” The Cat waved its right paw round, “lives the Mad Hatter. And in THAT direction,” waving the other paw, “lives a March Hare.”

“I’ll go that way,” Alice said, gesturing toward the March Hare. She wanted no part of this ‘Mad Hatter.’

Visit either you like: they're both mad.”

“But I don't want to go visit crazy people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can't help that,” said the Cheshire Cat. “Not if you wish to find the Queen. For it is only the truly mad who will aid you on *that* quest. Good luck,” said the Cat, and vanished.

Alice was not much surprised at this; she was getting so used to strange things happening. While she was looking at the place where it had been, it suddenly appeared again.

“One last thing,” said the Cat. “Don't tell them I sent you.”

“I won't,” she said.

“Good,” said the Cat, and vanished again.

Alice waited a little, half expecting to see it again, but it did not appear, and after a minute or two she walked on in the direction in which the March Hare was said to live. “This Mad Hatter sounds especially bad,” she said to herself; “the March Hare is the better bet.” As she said this, she looked up, and there was the Cat again, sitting on a branch of a tree.

“I changed my mind,” said the Cat. “Do tell them I sent you.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am indeed. As they are very mad, I fear they will not help you unless they know I sent you.”

“All right then,” said Alice.

“All right,” echoed the Cheshire Cat. This time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained

some time after the rest of it had gone.

Chapter Five: A Mad Tea-Party

Alice took off walking. She had not gone much farther before she came in sight of the house of the March Hare. She thought it must be the right house, because the chimneys were shaped like ears and the roof was thatched with fur.

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it. A Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head.

Very uncomfortable for the Dormouse, thought Alice. Only, as it's asleep, I guess it doesn't mind.

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it: “No room! No room!” they cried out when they saw Alice coming.

“There’s plenty of room!” said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large armchair at one end of the table.

“Have some wine,” the March Hare said immediately. He produced a bottle of red wine. As soon as he uncorked a horrific smell came pouring out – that of overripe flowers and ammonia. Alice would recognize it anywhere: vampire blood. She watched as he poured it into her tea cup.

“That doesn’t smell like wine,” she remarked.

“It is wine!” said the March Hare. “It’s the finest wine in all the land! Drink up, please. Don’t be rude.”

“No,” said Alice angrily. “I will not drink up. Because that’s not wine you just poured me. It’s vampire blood.”

“No, it’s not,” said the March Hare. He poured some into his own teacup. “Here, I will prove it. I will drink some myself.” And with that, he picked up his cup and quickly downed the entire contents of it.

In that moment Alice knew; that’s why they were both so mad. They were Halflings.

The March Hare wiped off his lips with his hand. “Only Halflings drink the blood of the undead,” he said, and poured himself another cupful. “And as I am not a Halfling, I cannot be drinking vampire’s blood.” He poured a cup for the Hatter, who quickly downed it as well.

“But you *are* drinking vampire blood,” Alice said again. “And so is he.”

The Hare shook his head vehemently. “No, we’re not. We’re drinking wine.”

They were even worse than the Halflings Alice had met back home. Back there, people knew they were Halflings; these two had somehow been transformed without even realizing it. It was an unsettling thing to see.

“Your hair wants cutting,” said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech.

“You should learn not to make personal remarks,” Alice said, touching her hair, and realizing that it had suddenly grown much longer than it had been even hours before. Not only that, but it was now jet black in color, instead of the silken golden blonde it had been earlier in the day. When had the change occurred? When she’d gone down the rabbit-hole? When she’d drunk the poison? Eaten the mushroom? Been captured by the bloodsuckers? Or had it happened just now, when she’d stepped up to the March Hare’s home? She shook her head, trying to force all the thoughts of it; her mind was getting so jumbled. Too much had happened too quickly.

She could see how a person could go mad in a place like this, even without the curse of being a Halfling.

“It’s very rude to criticize someone’s appearance,” Alice continued. “Especially someone you’ve just met.”

The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he said was, “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?”

Oh, dear, Alice thought. How in the world are these two ever going to lead me to the Blood Queen’s palace in time for the trial? I would have been better letting the two vampires carry me directly to her door!

She decided to press forward anyway. “The Cheshire Cat sent me.”

There was an agonizing silence, one that stretched on for so long Alice felt her hair must be growing several more inches during the time.

The Hatter was the first to break it. “What day of the month is it?” he said, turning to Alice: he had taken his watch out of his pocket, and was looking at it uneasily, shaking it every now and then, and holding it to his ear.

“Why does that matter?” she asked, irritably.

“There is only one reason the Cheshire Cat would have sent you to our tea party,” said the March Hare. “You must wish to find out information on the palace.”

Alice nodded. “I’m looking for the Blood Queen.”

“Well, I cannot tell you about her,” said the Hare.

Alice sighed. Not this again!

“But *he* can,” said the March Hare. “But you must answer his questions first. Answer anything he asks, no matter how unusual. Then he shall tell you all you need to know about the Queen.”

Alice had no time for twenty questions. But she also had no better option. She agreed to play along.

“What day of the month is it?” the Hatter asked again.

Alice considered a little, and then said, “The fourth.”

“Two days wrong!” sighed the Hatter. “I told you butter wouldn't suit the works!” he added looking angrily at the March Hare. “He put my watch in butter,” he explained to Alice. “And now it is off by two days.”

“It was the *best* butter,” the March Hare meekly replied.

“Yes, but some crumbs must have got in as well,” the Hatter grumbled, “You shouldn't have put it in with the bread knife.”

Alice couldn't believe what she was hearing; was this really what she'd been reduced to? Listening to two crazy fools argue back and forth over dipping watches in butter and bread crumbs? Why had she jumped down the rabbit-hole in the first place? Had her pride gotten the best of her? She was sure that was it; she'd made a horrible decision. She'd give anything to be out of this dreadful place and back home fighting vampires – vampires who weren't fifteen feet tall and ruled by a mysterious Blood Queen. At least there she could do some good; here she was subject to the whims of whatever strange creature she happened upon next.

“I answered your question,” she said, as politely as she could. “Now can you give me information about the Blood Queen?”

“I vote we change the subject,” the Hatter said, yawning. “I'm getting tired of this. I vote the young lady tells us a story.”

“I'm afraid I don't know one,” said Alice, feeling her anger rising. “And I won't stand for changing the subject until you give me the information I've come for.”

“Just for saying that,” the Hatter said, matching her anger, “I will tell you nothing of the Queen!” He leapt up from the table. “I will only tell you of the King!”

“Yes!” agreed the March Hare. “We will only speak of the King to you, young lady, for you have angered us very much.”

Alice was silent. She didn't know whether to laugh, cry, or scream. In truth, she felt like doing all three. She felt like retrieving her stakes and driving them straight through the hearts of these two mad imbeciles when the Mad Hatter said:

“I am doing you a favor young lady, for it is the King you must be truly afraid of. You are a silly girl to worry over the Blood Queen. The Blood King is far more powerful. He drinks the blood of infant children and it has made him very strong. He is not allergic to sunlight and can travel the land any time he wants.”

Alice had been on the verge of standing up and leaving, but something in the way he said it stopped her. He didn't sound quite so mad.

“What King?” she asked. “I didn't know there was a King.”

“There isn't,” said the March Hare.

“Yes, there *is*,” said the Mad Hatter. “You always forget he exists because he can take many forms, take on the shape of any living creature that he wants,” he told the March Hare. “This is one of his powers, and it is part of what makes him so dangerous. You never see him coming, because he could be anyone. He is probably you for all I know!”

They both paused for a moment, looking at each other with great suspicion.

“Tell me all you know about the King?”

“You stupid girl,” said the March Hare, “You believe every word he says, you are but a fool. There is no King.”

“Stupid girl!” The Hatter echoed, and then he went back to prattling on about his watch.

This piece of rudeness was more than Alice could bear. Seeing that she would get no more useful information out of them – presuming any of what she’d gotten could be deemed as useful – she got up in great disgust, and walked off.

“A lot of help they were,” said Alice as she picked her way through the wood. But she couldn’t help wondering as she went, which time were they telling the truth? Was there a King or wasn’t there? And could he really shape shift? If that was true, that meant he could be anyone she’d encountered along the road. Her suspicions immediately ran to the Caterpillar, who had conveniently advised her to eat the wrong side of the mushroom – right as the two vampires showed up.

Just as she thought this, she noticed that one of the trees had a door leading right into it. It appeared to be a portal of some kind. Perhaps this was why the Cheshire Cat had sent her over here after all? Perhaps this door led to somewhere special. And in she went.

Chapter Six: Off With Their Head

When she came out the other side she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flowerbeds and the cool fountains.

A large rose tree stood near the entrance of the garden: the roses growing on it were white, but there were three gardeners at it, busily painting them red.

Alice thought this a very curious thing, and she went nearer to watch them, she realized it wasn't paint they were using at all, but blood: human blood.

Alice ducked behind one of the large rose bushes, careful to remain out of view.

"Look out now, Five! Don't go splashing blood over me like that!"

"I couldn't help it," said Five, in a sulky tone, "Seven banged my elbow."

On which Seven looked up and said, "That's right, Five! Always lay the blame on others!"

"You'd better not talk!" said Five. "I heard the Queen say only yesterday you deserved to be beheaded!"

"What for?" said the one who had spoken first.

"That's none of your business, Two!" said Seven.

"Yes, it *is* his business!" said Five, "and I'll tell him – it was for bringing the cook 2-year-old blood, when you know good and well all blood has to be from the body of a newborn infant."

At this moment Two, who had been anxiously looking across the garden, called out, “The Queen! The Queen!” and the three gardeners instantly threw themselves flat upon their faces.

There was a sound of many footsteps, and Alice looked round, horrified at the thought that the Blood Queen might be approaching right here and now. She thought she had a few more hours until sundown, but was shocked to see that the sun was rapidly disappearing from the sky.

Alice ducked down lower, cowering behind the large rose bush, the stakes she’d carved earlier hidden carefully beside her.

The procession was never-ending. Alice could see glimpses of it through the holes in the rose bush. She was careful to remain hidden as she peaked out.

First came ten soldiers carrying clubs; next ten courtiers, ornamented all over with diamonds and rubies. Next came members of the royal family; there must have been a hundred of them, all vampires, standing tall and proud as they walked out dressed from head to toe in solid red. Finally came the guests, and among them Alice recognized the White Rabbit; it was talking in a hurried nervous manner, smiling at everything that was said, and went by without noticing her. Then followed the tall vampire Alice had seen earlier in the day, the one she’d followed down the rabbit-hole. He was carrying the Queen’s crown on a crimson velvet cushion; and, last of all this grand procession, came THE BLOOD QUEEN.

Alice was stunned as she caught the first glimpse of her. The Blood Queen was breathtaking in every way imaginable – where vampires usually possessed strange, mangled features, the Blood Queen was blessed with beautiful cheekbones, ruby red lips, and flowing long blonde hair. She was slim and angelic, not nearly as tall as her vampire brethren. She moved gracefully, so much so that Alice briefly thought she was floating, not walking, as she moved.

Alice stood absolutely still, watching in awe as this delicate creature took the throne and bent forward so the crown could be placed firmly upon her head.

So much for the Mad Hatter and the March Hare and their ridiculous tale of a Blood King, Alice thought. It was obvious now that the Queen was ruler of this land.

Once she was seated, she said, “And who are these?” pointing to the three gardeners who were lying round the rose tree; why are they in my court?

Before anyone could answer, the Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at the crowd for a moment like a wild beast, screamed, “Off with their heads! Off with their heads!”

Out of nowhere, two vampires appeared, holding axes. They moved swiftly, so swift that one of the gardeners had just begun to scream, “Please! Spare me! I am not the one!” but his could not finish his speech before his head went rolling along the grass.

Alice drew in a breath and tried hard to keep from gasping out loud. One by one, the men’s heads were lopped off, and sent rolling as the crowd of vampires cheered. Alice felt herself growing dizzy from the sight of it when a tiny hand reached out to steady her. She jumped in alarm.

It was the White Rabbit. He had somehow found his way behind the rose bush where she was hiding, and had come to join her. He put a finger up to his lips, and motioned for her to be silent.

“I thought you said there would be a trial?” Alice whispered.

“There will be,” he whispered back.

“She’s just beheading people left and right!” Alice was horrified. “This isn’t a trial at all.”

“Oh, I didn’t know about this,” the White Rabbit said. “This wasn’t planned. It’s usually just one beheading a night. But one of the gardeners painted the rose bush the wrong color, and another gave the Queen the wrong kind of blood, so she decided to do away with all three of them.”

“You need to get one of those axes,” he told her, motioning towards the executioners axes.

“What good will it do me?” Alice whispered.

“You can use it to kill the Queen,” the Rabbit said. “They will soon bring out the defendant for the trial. But the trial will be very short. After she gives the order for a beheading, she will be so excited she will lose all focus; she will be vulnerable for one brief moment. That is when you must act. You will have a brief window, when they march the prisoner down before her. As they prepare to behead him, you must make your move.”

The White Rabbit turned to go. Before he left, Alice thought to ask:

“Who is the prisoner?”

“Tobias,” he said. “The other slayer.”

* * *

Alice couldn’t believe what the White Rabbit had just told her. So there was another slayer – it wasn’t just idle chatter. Not only that, but he was alive and well and living here in Wonderland.

For the moment, at least.

If the White Rabbit was right – and he’d been right about everything thus far – in just a few moments Tobias would be brought out for a mock trial

and then quickly sentenced to a beheading. Very quickly, if it went anything like what happened to the poor gardeners.

Alice knew she had to act fast. Not only could she not bear to see the Blood Queen kill another helpless victim – but this was her only chance for escape. If Tobias was brought out and beheaded, and Alice did nothing, she would likely find her own head on the chopping block moments later.

Her eyes fell to the axe that still lay abandoned in the garden. The vampire had set it down immediately after beheading his three victims and had not yet come around to pick it up again. It took every ounce of willpower Alice had not to run out and grab it straight away. Seeing the axe lying just a few feet from her hiding place was almost too much to bare, but she knew she had to be patient. If she made her move right now – while the Queen was still in top form – it would be a suicide mission. She had to bide her time until just the right moment. Hopefully, she'd be able to grab the axe before the vampire came to retrieve it....

“Maxmillian!” The Queen yelled, and Alice peeked around the rose bush to see the blonde-haired vampire from earlier emerge into the Queen's court. “Fetch me the prisoner!”

“Yes, your Highness,” said Maxmillian.

Alice wondered if he'd be tempted to take a bite out of Tobias as he had been with her earlier. But if he was, it didn't show. Within a split second, Maxmillian had returned, carrying a cloaked figure in his arms.

“Who do you present before me?” asked the Queen.

“Your Majesty, I present the slayer,” he said. “Alice Graves.”

Alice gasped as she heard him announce her name. What was he talking about? Who did he have under the cloak? The White Rabbit had told her it was Tobias, the other vampire slayer, but he had obviously been mistaken. Either way, it certainly wasn't *her*.

Either way, Alice watched in horror as the Queen said, “Very well. Off with her head!”

Maxmillian nodded and the whole crowd cheered.

Alice knew, right then and there, that it was time to make her move. She turned and looked onto the ground, but the axe was gone.

Chapter Seven: Escape from Wonderland

It was then that Alice felt a tap on her shoulder.

“Looking for this?” It was the White Rabbit!

Alice nodded silently. She was terribly confused by the whole scene.

“I grabbed it for you while they brought out the prisoner.”

“I thought you said it was Tobias?” Alice asked.

The Rabbit shrugged. “That was what I heard.”

“But, then, who is it?” Alice asked.

“I don’t know.” He handed her the axe. “There’s no time for this. You must make your move now if you’re to kill the Queen. Run!” He said.

Alice didn’t need to be told twice. She was still shocked by the turn of events, but she took off for the Queen at full speed, axe in hand. She could still feel the effects of the magic mushroom working on her, as she was stronger and faster than normal, though still no match for the vampires. She’d barely covered half the distance of the garden when Maxmillian grabbed her and scooped her up into his arms.

She swung the axe, searching for the soft spot on his neck, and missed, hitting him in the chest. Maxmillian staggered backwards slightly, giving her just enough time to break free. But the axe was stuck. Alice tried to pull it free, but it was lodged tightly in the vampire’s sternum.

It was then that she heard a loud commotion. Alice whirled around to see that the prisoner had emerged from underneath the cloak and was now wielding a sharp knife. “Here!” he said, throwing the dagger to her. Alice barely had time to catch it, and was grateful for all the time she’d spent training with her mom back home. She just caught the dagger by the handle, holding it in one hand as she charged forward toward the Queen.

She had no idea who the prisoner was or why he’d tossed the knife to her, but then she heard him yell, “The vein!” she knew instantly what he meant – and who he must be.

Only another slayer would know about the bloodletting.

Could this be Tobias?

The Queen sat still on her throne. Her skin had gone ghostly white, many shades paler than any vampire Alice had ever seen before. Alice couldn’t believe she was just sitting here, calmly waiting as Alice raced up the steps, dagger in hand.

Alice had never attempted a bloodletting. She knew the procedure well, but only in theory. The vein was located on the vampire’s left hand, just beneath the nail bed of their ring finger. Sever it fully, and it would bleed out worse than a carotid artery. Rumor had it that back in the day vampires had used this technique when they wished to commit suicide, piercing their own left ring finger with their teeth.

Alice moved quickly, still spurred on by the power of the mushroom. With lightening speed, she dove in, grabbing the Queen’s left hand, twisting the nail back and driving the dagger deep under the skin. For a brief second nothing happened and then, in an explosion of red befitting one named the Blood Queen, an eruption of red liquid exploded from her hand, dousing Alice from head to toe and spraying down all who stood near. Alice staggered backward, rubbing the blood out of her eyes. She looked down to see her dress, once white in the front, was now covered in blood.

She couldn't believe how easy it had been. All these years she'd feared bloodletting, for it required getting so close to a vampire's hand, with their long vicious nails.

The Queen screamed in horror, as her body began to shrink and shrivel.

Alice couldn't believe how easy this had all been. Then, suddenly....

"Thank you, my dear." She turned around to find the White Rabbit, standing next to the man she had presumed was Tobias. Only the Rabbit didn't look so much like a rabbit anymore. His teeth were big, protruding. Fangs. And he was holding Tobias by the neck.

"Thank you for taking care of my wife." The Rabbit smiled and his fangs came out, fully extended.

Alice could only watch, in horror, as the White Rabbit transformed before her eyes, shifting from a simple, harmless bunny into a fifteen-foot tall bloodsucker.

He laughed, a wicked cackle that she recognized all too well as the famous vampire snarl.

"She really has been an awful pain," he said. "But you have taken care of her – with a little help from me, no doubt. I took the liberty of placing a weakening mushroom in her nightly meal, which is why it was so easy for you to attack and kill her. But kill her, you did. So, for that, I will spare your life."

"You're the King?" Alice asked, but even then she knew the answer. All around her, subjects were bowing before him.

Alice was stunned. How could this be happening? The Mad Hatter's words flashed through her mind:

“It is the King you must be truly afraid of. He can take many forms, take on the shape of any living creature that he wants. It is part of what makes him so dangerous. You never see him coming, because he could be anyone.”

She had never seen him coming. All this time, all along, he had been right there. And she had done his bidding. She had killed his wife. In the background, she could see Maxmillian, who had since dislodged the axe from his chest, weeping as he gathered the Queen’s bloodied body in his arms and carried her off toward the palace.

“But why?” Alice asked.

“Because, now I have ALL the power,” the King said.

Alice still stood there, dumbfounded. “Then why didn’t you just kill her yourself?”

“Because it is forbidden by vampire law. A vampire cannot kill another vampire, or they lose all their powers,” he said.

“So you needed a slayer to do it,” Alice finished.

“Precisely.”

“Why didn’t you just get Tobias?” she asked.

“Because he *liked* my wife,” The King said, exasperated, as if this were the most annoying thing on the planet. “I brought him here to kill her, but he figured out my plan and refused to go through with it. I had him locked away in the castle before he could tell her. I kept him alive for years, hoping he would change his mind. But, alas, now that you have done the deed I can get rid of him.”

“NO!” Alice objected. “You let him go with me.”

The King seemed to be considering this when, suddenly, Tobias, who had been standing there silently all along, grabbed the axe from the ground and brought it swiftly to the King's throat. He paused, waiting to strike. The crowd gasped. "No one moves or it's off with *his* head," he said.

"You can't kill our King!" said Dreck, one of the vampires who had capture Alice earlier in the day. "We'll have no one to rule over us. What will we do?"

"That's not my problem."

"You cannot kill me," The King said. "Or you'll have a far worse problem on your hands. I rule this group with an iron fist." He laughed. "You kill me, and you'll have no order. You'll have a war on your hands, a bloodbath unlike anything you've seen before. Every vampire in Wonderland will ascend up the well to wreak havoc on you and all you love. That's a war you cannot win, my boy, trust me on this."

Tobias seemed to be considering the King's words. "Maybe so. But I think I'd like to take my chances."

The King eyed him nervously. "You're just crazy enough to do it, aren't you boy? Will you seriously not listen to reason?"

"I'll spare your life, but on one condition."

"What's that?" The King asked.

"You say you rule with an iron fist?"

"Yes."

Tobias drove the axe blade in harder to the King's throat. "Then promise me right here and now that you'll keep control of your hoard, that you'll keep

them all below ground, where they belong. I don't want to ever see one of these bloodsuckers come up that rabbit-hole again."

"That's a deal."

"I mean it."

"And I've agreed. You have my word on it. I stake my life." He laughed at the pun.

"Very well," said Tobias. "But I'd advise you not to break your word to me. I may not have much power down here, but I've an entire army of slayers up above, and *you* don't want to face the wrath of them."

They shook on it, tentatively, and to Alice's astonishment he let the King go.

"Very well, then," The King said. "You two can go home."

As they walked away Alice took stock of her fellow slayer for the first time. He was handsome, with dark brown hair and eyes. He looked to be a few years older than her, perhaps in his twenties.

"Why did you let him go?" Alice asked as they walked away.

"He was right," Tobias said. "Killing him would have solved nothing. It would have just created disorder and chaos and a whole angry herd."

"Then why did you give me the dagger to kill the Queen?"

"I never had an alliance with her," he said. "It was only pretend, for survival. That's how I got this. He produced a small pouch from beneath his cloak.

"What's that?" Alice asked.

“Our ticket home,” Tobias asked.

“Besides, the Queen was not much better than the King. She was merely a lesser evil, but she was still evil. And as long as she was alive, the King would continue to lure slayers here in his quest to kill her.”

Tobias unwrapped the pouch to reveal a small pink cake.

“Eat this,” Tobias said, handing her a piece of the cake.

“I can’t,” Alice told him.

“It’s the only way,” he told her. “We can go home again.”

“But the Queen, the King – we can’t just leave them alive!”

“This isn’t our war,” Tobias said. “The Queen’s too weak to do anything right now, and the King gave us his word.”

“And you believe him?”

“No, not really.” Tobias looked stricken. “But it’s the best option we have. If he doesn’t stick to it, we’ll come back. But we’ll come back armed and ready to fight. Here, today, right now...this is a battle we can’t win. We don’t have the weapons.”

“I already took out three vampires,” Alice said. “And you got five.”

“But we used up all our stakes, and the axe is broken,” he reminded her. “There’s no way we can keep going. We have to go home.”

Alice didn’t want to believe it, but she knew he was right. As much as it pained her to walk away from a battle, especially when they were so close to the beasts, she knew they had no other choice.

She took the cake from his hands and, slowly brought a piece up to her mouth. “If the King doesn’t keep his promise,” she said.

“We come back,” Tobias finished.

“How will I find you?” Alice asked.

Tobias pulled his cloak back to expose a bracelet on his wrist. She noticed it was made up of tiny bones. “If you need me, use this. It is magic.” He pulled it off and handed it to her.

“Be very careful with it. The power will only work once, and it brings with it quite a kickback.”

Alice slipped the bracelet onto her wrist.

And with that, they both took a bite of the cake at the same time. Alice had just finished swallowing when a hoard of vampires rounded the corner – the Queen’s minions, soaked from head to toe in her blood.

“There she is!” Maxmillian screamed. “Off with her head!”

They came flying down upon her.

Alice gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off...when suddenly, the whole garden went foggy. When she came to the vampires were gone! But so was Tobias.

Alice looked around, unable to believe what she was seeing. But sure enough she was lying on the hill outside her home, staring up to see the sun rise through the trees.

She heard the door to the house open and Lorina emerged, rested and happy that the nighttime was over and she no longer had to remain locked away.

“Hey there!” her sister called, coming down the hill. “Busy night?”

Alice smiled and waved her away. There was no use in trying to explain. Lorina could barely understand the simple workings of their world; to tell her of the previous nights events would only exhaust her. Alice fingered the bracelet on her wrist, the one reminder that it had all been true. One day, maybe, her sister could understand. But for now it would remain a secret.

A secret with so many unanswered questions.

Where had Tobias gone? Would she ever see him again? And what about the King? Would he gain control of the kingdom now that the Queen was dead? And would he really keep his bargain to stay down below and never venture up the rabbit-hole again?

Somehow, Alice already knew the answer to these things, knew it was only a matter of time before she would find out, only a matter of time before she would go back. But even if she didn't, she knew in her heart that this strange place would forever be a part of her.

Alice sat on the grass, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland.

THE END